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Your Right to Know

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Formula milk's promotion blamed for declining breastfeeding trend

Staff Report

ISLAMABAD: The unethical promotion of artificial substitutes of breast milk is preventing mothers from breastfeeding newborns, says TheNetwork, a pro-consumer group.

Under international laws, baby formula milk cannot be promoted unethically in a way that it will undermine the importance of mother's milk for a baby.

"Breastfeeding is the ideal way of providing young infants with the nutrients they need for healthy growth and development", TheNetwork's Executive Coordinator

Dr Talib Lashari told a news conference here on Wednesday at the Rawalpindi/Islamabad Press Club Camp Office. The news conference was organised at the beginning of the World Breastfeeding Week that began on August 1. Dr Lashari said that after signing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Pakistan was bound to promote exclusive breastfeeding by mothers to infants within one hour of delivery. He said the Protection of Breastfeeding and Child Nutrition Ordinance, 2002 had also protected the right of an infant to have mother's milk soon after birth, but it

had yet to be implemented in letter and spirit due to certain hitches.

Dr Lashari warned non-breastfed children had higher risk of urinary tract infections, illnesses and even non-infectious diseases like insulin dependent diabetes mellitus.

"According to recent studies, in Pakistan, of 1000 live births, 78 infants die before reaching their first birthday, and of 1000 live births, 94 children die before reaching their fifth birthday," he said. He said exclusive breastfeeding reduced neonatal deaths by 22 percent. He said breastfeeding was a natural defense provided to infants and

children of two years of age. "Unfortunately, a lack of knowledge, illiteracy, ignorance, unethical marketing practices by baby milk substitute manufacturers and weak implementation of existing laws are major factors in the non-initiation of exclusive breastfeeding. It is a proven fact that breastfeeding can reduce infant and child morbidity and mortality," he said. He emphasised that exclusive breastfeeding be given top priority in health policy and planning. He also called for including breastfeeding initiation as an indicator for measuring preventive health.